

Roland Ellsworth Conklin

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ROLAND ELLSWORTH CONKLIN
PROFESSOR OF BOTANY AND GEOLOGY
DRAKE UNIVERSITY
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ROLAND ELLSWORTH CONKLIN

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BY F. I. HERRIOTT

Professor in Drake University

I applied my heart to know and to search and to seek
out wisdom and the reason of things.—Ecclesiastes VII-25.

Roland Ellsworth Conklin was a complex of various abilities and characteristics not often found together. He was a scholar and "a ripe and good one," and a scientist of the exact and rigorous sort. He possessed the sensitive nature and the discerning eye of a poet and he wielded a facile pen which could easily express delicate feelings in felicitous phrase and delineate the evanescent hues and shades of Nature's ceaseless phantasmagoria in lilting lines.

Plus all these Roland Conklin displayed a character with many facets whence flashed vari-colored lights. He was aloof and reserved with all outside his circle of intimates. He was indifferent to applause and contemptuous of disapproval of the uninformed. He preferred and coveted the silences of the cloister, or the laboratory, or the gentle murmurings of the forests and fastnesses of Nature to the claque of the theatre, or the noise of the market place or the raucous confusion in the public forum. Even with his friends he was often remote in thought, and so reticent in speech, that the stranger or the casual observer might conclude that he was discontented, incensed or repellent. Not so at all. While he was caviar to the general he won the admiration of familiars who easily became his friends. He held them fast bound when he would come out of his shell and let his genial spirit sway his tongue and illumine his serious eyes and features.

¹Various portions of the sections which follow were delivered at the funeral services of Professor Conklin in Chambersburg, Illinois, Tuesday, February 1, 1938.

I

Roland E. Conklin was born on December 16, 1860, in Chambersburg, Pike County, Illinois, where he died January 30, 1938. His parents were Roland Conklin and Harriett Winegar Conklin, emigrants from Boston, Massachusetts. He was one of four brothers and three sisters—all of whom, save one sister, survived him. He had his first schooling in Chambersburg, graduating from the high school, and going thence to Abingdon College in the Fall of 1877.²

He entered as a sub-freshmen, or "prep," as such novitiates were called in the flippant parlance of the campus. He obtained a degree of Bachelor of Literature from Abingdon in 1883 and an A.B. degree from Eureka College in 1886. He demonstrated that he had capacity in his studies of *Belle Lettres* and the "natural" or physical sciences.

He was not of the aggressive, forward-pushing type of student: rather the reverse. He was backward and shy or diffident: but with associates in his class he was always willing to enter into the common social life of the campus in diversions, or debates, or literary or musical efforts.

At Abingdon, and particularly at Eureka, young Conklin encountered influences which were potent in his later life—influences which are always the finest facts the youth of the land derive from their college days—he came within the circuit of three fine strong characters.

One was Francis M. Bruner, President of Eureka College. He had the lore and discipline of the Universities of Germany and France. He was an exact and exacting scholar. He possessed a forceful personality that energized ambitious young collegians.

The second cluster of beneficial influences he found in the family circle of Norman Dunshee, professor of mathematics and the ancient languages—a man of notable ability as a teacher. Young Conklin was not far enough along to register in his classes, but he studied drawing and painting under his daughter, Miss Josie Dunshee, who inspired him with ideals of art and poetry which flourished in his life. In that family

²The writer is indebted to Mrs. Donald E. Conklin of Claremont, California, and to Mrs. Roland E. Conklin of Chambersburg, Illinois, for data relating to Professor Conklin's family and connections.

circle he became acquainted with the finer forms and modes of culture which stirred him, enlarged his horizon and extended the range and sweep of his aspirations.

The third beneficent influence was Henry L. Bruner, son of President Bruner, who taught him the laws of physical nature in the fields of chemistry, biology, botany, and geology. He brought to Eureka the culture and technique of Yale's Sheffield Scientific School. He was a teacher who inspired his classes with enthusiasm for his subjects. From him Roland Conklin acquired a consuming desire to know Nature and her laws and to hold

Communion with her visible forms
... and various language.

Professor Conklin always frankly stated that he owed more to Henry L. Bruner, now of Butler University, for correct instruction in the physical sciences than to any teacher he ever had.³

After graduation he taught in the schools of Versailles and Kankakee as superintendent and principal. In 1887 his ability and scholarship were signalized by his call to Eureka College as Professor of Biology and Geology. In 1891 he entered Harvard University where he obtained both baccalaureate and magistral degrees in 1892-1893:—botany and geology being his major studies. He then returned to his professorial work at Eureka where he continued until 1907, when he was elected to the Chair of Botany and Geology in Drake University, which position he held until his retirement twenty-two years later (1929) as Professor Emeritus.

Somewhat of the esteem in which his scientific habits and work was held may be inferred from sundry appointments accorded him. In the summer of 1889 he was a matriculate in the Harvard Summer School of Geology of New York and New England. He was an Assistant in the United States Fish Commission Laboratory in the famous Woods Hole, Massa-

³The premises of the statements about Professor Conklin's career at Abingdon and Eureka Colleges are letters of Professor Conklin to the writer, dated at Chambersburg, Ill., Sept. 24, 1935, and published in the *Annals of Iowa*, 3rd Series, XX, 265; of Professor Henry L. Bruner of Butler University, Indianapolis, Indiana, and of Miss Ada C. Scott of Des Moines, Iowa, to the writer; and interviews with Mrs. D. F. Givens and of Dr. H. A. Minassian of Des Moines—the latter student associates of Professor Conklin in Abingdon and Eureka; and Dean S. J. Harrod of Eureka College, Eureka, Illinois.

chusetts, in 1892; in the Agassiz Laboratory, Newport, Rhode Island, in 1893; in the Laboratory of the University of Washington in Puget Sound, and the Biological Laboratory of the University of Southern California at La Jolla and the Hopkins Laboratory of Leland Stanford in 1904.⁴ After he came to Drake he was offered the curatorship of one of Boston's museums, with a commission that authorized his enlarging the collections from all parts of the world.

Needless to say such appointments are not tendered to charlatans, nonentities, or second-rate men.

Professor Conklin, as has been the wont of many another within the wooded precincts of *Academia*, had but little interest in the latter-day Goddess, Publicity. He seldom broke into print. During his professorship at Eureka College he published two papers, "Mountain Studies" and "The Enjoyment of Nature."⁵ He wrote a concise, lucid, vivid narrative; and we shall see that he was an adept in effective expression in either prose or poetry. Various inquiries of associates and colleagues as to his reports or his scientific investigations or researches in which he was engaged between 1892 and 1920 have been unavailing. He was so reticent and reserved about his work; the death of Mrs. Conklin in 1912 and his much travelling between Chambersburg, Illinois, Des Moines, and California after her death probably account for the dispersion of any papers and memoranda he may have planned to preserve. He seldom attended meetings of learned associations or societies—although he was a constant reader of scientific journals and had his data at his tongue's end in class and lecture room. After a brilliant lecture in Hobb's Hall in which he held his audience in a state of wonder at the beauties and majesty of nature's ways he was asked by a friend why he did not go on the popular lecture platform. He shrugged his shoulders, and with a look of weariness said that he did not care to take the time away from his classes and studies.

There were many interesting phases of Professor Conklin's many-sided character. It may be noted in passing that few

⁴C. B. Blanchard, *History of Drake University*, p. 82.

⁵*The Pegasus*, May, 1894; March, 1900.

outside his family circle at Drake knew of his marked ability in the efficient handling of tools and in mechanical work of divers sorts. He could install or repair electric fixtures, or plumbing devices, or make concrete posts, or walks with equal facility. He was careful, exact and concerned with the aesthetic appearances as well as the mechanical efficiency of the results.

His practical efficiency was recognized by the voters of Eureka while he was a member of their college faculty. He was for several years (1901-1907) a member of its City Council and one of his colleagues thus recalls his work and reputation:

... he was an influential member of the City Council for several terms. His clear head and good judgment were appreciated by his fellow Councilmen and he usually furnished the wording for motions, resolutions, etc.

He was Chairman of the Committee on Finance, the steering committee of the Council, and in that capacity directed the reorganization of the City's finances (which had previously been in a chaotic state) re-established credit, and thus made possible a new water works system, paving and other municipal improvements.

A champion of strict and vigorous law enforcement, he consistently supported and encouraged the police in their work.

Once in a discussion of a proposed ordinance he made the statement "laws should make it easier for people to do right and harder for them to do wrong." I think that was quite expressive of his political philosophy.⁶

Another facet of Professor Conklin's complex character was strikingly shown, years ago, in a troublesome lawsuit to which he found himself subjected. He was a co-signer on some notes with a number of friends on whom he relied and followed. The party who secured his signature was a dubious individual who obtained it by shady pretenses. A bank bought the notes and, when they were in default, sued the co-signers. Professor Conklin resisted payment on the ground of fraudulent representations. Before and during the trial, when on the witness stand, he seemed loath to give his attorney details. The latter was discouraged by reason of his client's attitude. When he ceased questioning him he feared an adverse verdict,

⁶Richard Dickinson to F. I. Herriott, letter dated at Eureka, Ill., January 28, 1938.

for he felt that he would be routed by the bank's attorney who had ability and skill in cross-examination. But the attorneys, the judge and jury were given a sharp surprise. Professor Conklin's air of cynical indifference, languor, and weariness suddenly vanished as soon as he perceived the drift of the questions of the plaintiff's counsel. He was wide awake, alert and instant in his rejoinders and retorts. Immediately he had things in his own hands and took charge of the bank's lawyer and worsted him in every effort he made to catch him or embarrass him, to the astonishment of the jury and the chagrin of the learned counsel. He easily won his case. The jury found that his signature had been obtained by fraud. His attorney, who knew his client for several years concludes his letter to me with an interesting observation: "Professor Conklin, wherever I observed him, seemed to try to conceal his ability, and he never tried to appear as good as he really was."

II

Professor Conklin was a thorough-going scientist. He was deeply interested in all phases of his special subjects. He was a keen observer of the endless changing phenomena of Nature; he was careful in gathering, sifting, weighing, and classifying evidence. He was relentless in following the logic and drift of facts: but he was hesitant in reaching conclusions. He was cautious in expressing his opinions on moot points; and he was considerate of dissentients. But he was fearless in statement when he was certain of his ground and confident that he had comprehended all of the basic and relevant facts needed for sound judgment.

His careful, exacting reasoning, his eagerness in his search for nature's secrets, and his instinctive dislike of those who professed impatience with the slow process of finding truth were powerful and often challenging stimulants to those who came to his class rooms as students. The vigor of the impression Professor Conklin made upon a student is suggested by an incident that occurred at a family table. This student had refrained from entering his classes for two years because

¹Professor L. S. Forrest to F. I. Herriott, letter dated at Des Moines, Iowa, April 9, 1938.

of an antecedent adverse notion about Professor Conklin. The young man found at the end of that time, however, that he needed a course in mineralogy to support a major in chemistry, and entered Professor Conklin's class in the fall of his junior year. Some weeks later the student was sitting at dinner; he was uncommunicative; his thoughts were far away; he was absent-mindedly thrumming his plate. Suddenly he hit the table a resounding thwack that made the dishes jump and exclaimed: "That old boy knows his stuff!!" Every one of the family was startled. He was plumped with the question: "In the name of all the Saints, young man, of whom are you speaking?" He smiled somewhat ruefully and shamefacedly and replied, "Oh, Professor Conklin and his discussion in class today." The young man who thus exclaimed his appreciation is now a research chemist on the technical staff in the Rockefeller Institute in Princeton.

In conducting classes Professor Conklin presented variable phases of his interesting personality. In his manner of exposition in lectures, Professor Conklin was far from dramatic or sensational. He was no "rabble rouser." *Per contra*, he was undemonstrative. His voice was pitched low, he spoke quietly, with no ostentatious effort to attract students. He indulged in no peculiar histrionic technique, such as trying to be "magnetic" or vivacious with fling or quip with which many seekers after popularity spray their lectures. The student who entered his class with no other concern than to obtain a "required" credit, whose mind and effort were largely given to "academic atmosphere" or athletics or "social diversion" would not find his lectures interesting. But the person or student honestly seeking acquaintance with botany or geology could always enlist his instant and generous interest: he was considerate and patient in explanation.

III

Professor Conklin was enthralled by his subjects. To those who displayed a real interest in them he delighted to give him or her the best of his knowledge and generous assistance in counsel. Conferences with him in his laboratory, when uninterrupted by troublesome student problems, are especially

remembered by those who enjoyed his friendship. But he gave short shrift to the arrogant gentry who know little of science or history and shut their eyes to obvious facts or refuse to listen to careful exposition.

Those who cared for his subjects have many golden memories of his lectures, and of his informal talks in his office or in walks in park, or field, or forest. In unpredictable ways and times he would begin an account or description of some of Nature's processes in the formation of the earth's strata or of the life of birds or flowers or trees and students would find themselves a-thrill sensing the beauty of his word pictures and poetical delineation of the subtle differences in Nature's great kaleidoscope. He would hold forth in such vivid picturesque phrasing that his students would be fascinated.

A lecture delivered by him to the faculty and students of Eureka College at Assembly on the "Biography of a Boulder," in which he traced the origin of such a type of rock, its career during the glacial drifts and ice flows, and its progress from the northern regions southward into Illinois, was given in language, so pithy and vivid, that his exposition of its scientific significance enthralled his hearers. One of them still recalls his performance that morning with astonishment at his mastery of his subject and his literary skill in presentation.

One evening in the fall of 1923 I sat in the lecture room of Hobbs Hall crowded with a mixed company of students, teachers, and others. He was delivering a popular lecture on the "Formation of the Earth." It was not a subject which would ordinarily stir the imagination of the average audience. Suddenly I became aware of an astonishing stillness—I could hear birds twittering, in the trees near by. For ten minutes, it seemed to me, one could hear a pin drop. Professor Conklin, small of stature, stood in front of his audience speaking quietly, without a gesture, gazing off into space—seemingly unmindful of his hearers; his mind concerned only with the ongoing of the great cosmic forces and factors that focused in the formation of this planet of ours. His mind's eye was following the evolution of life from the mysterious energy inhering in the masses of matter which slowly became the substance of this whirling sphere of ours and of all of its

myriad forms of animated nature. He seemed to be utterly oblivious of the two hundred people in the room. It was a spectacle that, for the nonce, made me forget precisely what he was saying in such a strangely interesting fashion.

IV

In the early days of his career at Drake, Professor Conklin was often irritated and perplexed by the belligerent questionings of adherents of the historic religious dogmas as to the import of modern scientific discoveries and theories about our stellar system, the formation of the Earth, and the origin of life and its evolution into the infinite varieties we see all about us.

He especially disliked dealing with contentious dissentients in religious matters. He avoided controversy when he could; for he was keenly aware of the serious disturbance of the peace of mind of those brought up in the old-time beliefs caused by many modern scientific discoveries and theories. He was considerate in discussions and in personal conference was gracious in explanation and his effort was to allay their doubts and dread lest the foundations of life and character were being heedlessly undermined.

He accepted without reservation the Nazarene's assertion that "the truth shall make you free" and despite the confusion and contradiction of saints and scientists he was certain that man ultimately can explain all of the mysteries of life and the universe. He concurred with Tennyson's confidence:

The sun, the moon, the stars, the sea,
the hills and the plains
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of
Him who reigns.

Professor Conklin made his students appreciate that the true scientist and lover of truth must follow the injunction of the royal Hebrew seer—"with all thy getting get understanding." For him Isaiah prescribed the correct procedure in the search for truth, "Come, now let us reason together." He ever held St. Paul's rule to be the golden maxim for life and education: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is

good." He made the earnest students of the rocks and flowers realize that

The Holy Grail is found,
Found in each Poppy's cup of gold.

V

How vivid and lasting were the impressions made by Professor Conklin's character and personality, his mannerisms and class technique upon those interested in his lectures, or those who met him in informal interviews, or in chance conversations, either in his laboratory or in walks in the park or woods may easily be inferred from the excerpts which follow. They are taken from memoranda and letters of his students. While each one refers more or less to similar traits, each gives us glimpses of different phases of the man.

One of the students in his first year at Drake (1907-08), now Associate Professor of History in Drake, Miss Ethel Mae Jones, recalls her experiences in his classes with more than ordinary pleasure. Like many another student in those days she was sorely disturbed by the effect of the modern scientific discoveries and theories of geology and biology upon the authenticity of the "Creation" story in Genesis. He dispersed her doubts and perplexities with notable success. To the writer's inquiry whether she recalled Professor Conklin's classes, she replied:

O yes, I remembered him with pleasure. What stood out most forcibly in my memory of him?

I thought a moment. I could still see Professor Conklin's discomfort when students were indifferent to the subject he was presenting and I could also see his amused smile one day as I grew excited over a tiny bit of life under the microscope. Was it a plant or was it an animal that was racing about in that drop of water? With a few pointed remarks he made a small group of us students conscious of a mind in search of the truth. We caught a glimpse of a man who loved the beauties of nature and one who was anxious to help us see and understand a bit of the wondrous universe about us, that is if we were interested. He saw little reason for wasting time and energy on the student who was in his class simply for a grade.

However my most vivid memory of Professor Conklin was a rare hour spent alone with him in his office. Before us on the table lay his Bible opened to the first chapters of Genesis. I knew he was a declared

Christian, a member of a church with an orthodox pastor. I knew he thoroughly believed in evolution and this was my first science course when the development of life from the most simple forms to the highly complex seemed so clearly evident. I was struggling in my own mind over many questions and he had sensed the situation.

As I remember I had gone to his office to ask some question about an assignment. Some of my perplexities came to the surface. There and then he invited me to sit down while he reached for his Bible. We discussed life and its beginnings, and the stories in those early chapters of the Old Testament. I had my first lesson in historical criticism as applied to the development of religion. I was not only in the presence of a scientist but of a poet. I have loved that opening chapter of Genesis ever since. I then began to read and study the Old Testament as I had never read it before. It became a living book, a picture of man's struggle as he tried to explain his own life and find his God and his Creator.

I walked out of that office with new vistas before me. That day there was born the determination to study the development of religions as I was then studying my science and my history. Something too had happened to me. I found myself at peace with my little world. Professor Conklin, the scientist, the poet, the Christian gentleman, had helped a simple country girl find a place in a complicated universe where life seemed real and worthwhile.⁸

The next student quoted, Miss Fae McClung, now Mrs. Kenneth Shawhan, later became a colleague of the Faculty as Assistant Professor of Biology:

One of the essential features of good teaching is knowledge of subject matter. . . . Professor Conklin had at his command a wealth of material pertaining to the subject he was teaching. I was always impressed with his "intellectual honesty." One has profound respect for the teacher who will, at least occasionally, condescend to say "I don't know," instead of trying, (usually unsuccessfully) to cover up "limited knowledge!" . . . Professor Conklin usually knew—if he didn't, he was the first to admit it. A student could depend upon what he said!

I always admired his modest unassuming attitude. We have all known teachers whose main purpose in life seems to be to impress others with their intelligence and what they assume to be "general superiority." There was none of this in the life of Professor Conklin. On the contrary, it is my opinion, that this modesty was somewhat taken advantage of by others, and that he took undue personal persecution because he wouldn't "fight back."

Because I had contact with students in about twenty hours of work under his personal supervision, I feel qualified to say that students in his classes had a profound respect for his work, and that even though

⁸Miss Ethel M. Jones' statement to F. I. Herriott, January 29, 1938, at Des Moines.

he had this very retiring nature, that he was always approachable. Personally, I recall many conferences—I'd rather call them "informal chats"—which Elizabeth Buck, Abbie and Helen Betts, and I have had in his office—out of class hours. Anything he said was interesting and contained food for thought. He was tolerant of students' immature and often warped ideas, and opened doors which were of tremendous importance to student thinking. That is another test of good teaching, leading students to think for themselves, and not to tell them *what* to think.

He was a teacher one does not forget, but appreciates more and more in the years following graduation. I cannot personally measure my appreciation of the opportunity of having been in his classes. The value received is beyond measurement.⁹

One of his Assistants, Miss Elizabeth Buck, now Mrs. C. J. McFarland of Prescott, Arizona, writes:

I remember him as generally giving the effect of being rather withdrawn from most student contacts and the "collegiate" atmosphere, but to one genuinely interested in his beloved Science of Botany he presented a very different aspect. He was one of the followers of the great Agassiz whose influence permeated the science courses of his own college days. I recall his telling with a twinkle of delight in his eyes how Agassiz at his first meeting a student would simply place a fish before him and leave him to find out for himself as much as he could before any help was given. Professor Conklin patiently taught Freshman after Freshman who "Took Botany," chiefly for the science credits but I think he never approved of the system of leading a pupil to a required subject and then pouring knowledge into him. His interest was in students who were eager to study each detail because they were fascinated as he was by the marvels of nature. Closely associated with that devotion to the exacting demands of science was a deep appreciation of the beautiful and the ideal which his shy spirit often caused him to conceal but which is so evident in his poems. I considered it an honor to be his assistant for one year and still more of an honor to be allowed to enjoy his poetic writings.¹⁰

Miss Helen Betts, now Mrs. W. Boyd Allen, was Professor Conklin's Assistant during the years 1922-24. For some time now, she has been in charge of the Rare Books of the "Treasure Room" of the Library of Harvard University. On hearing of the serious illness of her mentor in botany she instantly penned a letter recording her vivid memories of Professor Conklin which I reproduce *in extenso*:

⁹Mrs. Kenneth Shawhan's statement made to F. I. Herriott, December 3, 1937, at Des Moines.

¹⁰Mrs. C. J. McFarland to F. I. Herriott, letter dated December 2, 1937, at Prescott, Arizona.

He was first of all a human being to me, rather than a "mere professor." I think the best thing he did for me was to bring me to the realization of the relation of a specific study to the whole field of human knowledge. Botany wasn't just botany—a classifying of plants into orders, families and species—but was one part of all life, lapping over into zoology and geology, chemistry and so on. I took Dr. Morehouse's course in beginning Astronomy that first year, and got my mind stretched to the cracking point, but not even the great stars seemed more marvelous, more a part of a grand rhythmic whole than those tiny bits of life on the borderline between animals and plants.

The method Professor Conklin used was that of Agassiz, which was the one used at Harvard when the young man from Eureka studied here. He doled out specimens for our microscopes and put us to work. We'd ask questions—often foolish, of course—and he'd answer only, "That's our question." He expected *us* to tell *him*.

Alas! not many of us were up to it. I remember what a secret thrill I had when, as his assistant, I was deploring the poor work of careless students concerned only with credits, and he answered, "Give them the benefits of the doubt every time you can; we'll give them D's and get rid of them." You know what a revolutionary idea that must have seemed to me then. It is only just lately that the idea dare be broached—not every born-free-and-equal American is able to profit by "higher" education. Professor Conklin quietly "got rid" of the students who couldn't or wouldn't do the work and concentrated his efforts on those who were willing and able to get something out of his courses.

And those elect did work. For us there was no amount of his time too great to talk on everything and anything. He was one of the quietest radicals I ever knew. Outwardly he conformed, even wore a mask of dullness. Inwardly and to a few whom he felt were mental kin, he was as unconventional as could be. He put forth new (to me) ideas on immortality, immorality, religion, poetry, medicine—diet! He struggled against bitterness caused by pettiness and that made him seem very human to me.

In a thousand small ways he opened my eyes for me and made me see the farther horizon. His own keen blue eye was a symbol to me of that vision beyond. Almost always he veiled his eyes by keeping the lids nearly closed. But when he'd dart a glance at us with a sort of weary scorn for our childishness and say, "Pick up your doll-rags and go!" I was delighted with the aptness of the reproof to a class, composed chiefly of girls, restlessly awaiting the bell.

His real self was shy and poetic, and rather well summed up in the little scrap of verse he wrote in my college "Memory Book":

"Helen—Love Beauty, and the aura
Of her immortal flower
Will brighten all your pathway
And perfume every hour."

As I think of Professor Conklin, perhaps even now gone on ahead to his larger world, I think that in his own particular way every one of my mentors at Drake gave me glimpses of the great things.¹¹

The compensation of teachers in our colleges measured in terms of the coin of the realm has seldom been noteworthy for its amount, or certainty, and the conditions of its allowance are often trying. Such, however, is not the consideration which controls in the premises and holds them to their work. It is a fondness for the work with students and the feeling that they are dealing with young minds at the most important stages of their mental and moral development and in this way doing their bit to enhance the "general welfare." Memories such as those recorded in the preceding paragraphs are the rewards they hope for and which mean more than larger bank balances and any other evidence of tawdry fame.

VI

There was a genial cynicism, with occasional flashes of sardonic humor, in much of Professor Conklin's comment on men and measures. His constant scrutiny of nature induced much of the silence so notable in his conduct. The grandeur and majesty of nature's forces and manifestations—the mystery and potency of atoms, bacteria, electrons and microbes, for good and for evil in the ongoing of things and man's destiny, made him realize the futility and pathos of so much in the doings and sayings of poor mortals in this vale of tears. So much of what we do or say in the ordinary round of the day's routine is done for effect or it is bootless or witless. To Professor Conklin superfluous effort was a sin against law and the prophets.

I had a personal experience that remains green in my memory. Meeting him on University Avenue one bright day when the sun was brilliant and nature was at her best, I greeted him with the casual commonplace "It's a fine day, Professor." With a solemn air and a glint of a sardonic smile in his eye he instantly rejoined, "Well, what of it?" I smiled and responded "Check. No more!" Never again did I sin

¹¹Mrs. Wm. Boyd Allen to F. I. Herriott, letter dated November 30, 1937, at Cambridge, Mass.

likewise. What was the sense or use of saying aloud what was obvious to him and everyone.

But let no one infer that Roland Conklin was cold and indifferent to friends, or the good offices of associates. He was, we thought, lonesome because he shrank from intruding or interfering with the convenience of colleagues. He craved the companionship of congenial souls--and he was not insistent upon persons of like studies or tastes with himself. He was catholic in his interests and broad in his sympathies. He never displayed any sectarian or partisan narrowness in any of his relations within or outside the University. The welfare of friends, the theories of science, the beauties or the mysteries of nature, or some incident of student life or the state of the nation would elicit his interest. He was a delightful conversationalist when in the home of a colleague or in a group--although he was not a ready talker.

One notable characteristic of Roland Conklin was often displayed. It illustrated perfectly Emerson's test of true friendship; namely, that genuine friendship is demonstrated when one may be in another's presence for an hour and not say a word, and leave without adverse comment or inference. It was not infrequent when Professor Conklin would call on old friends that, aside from his initial curt greeting, he would sit for a half hour or more and not utter a word. It was not discourtesy or dullness or irritation: his mind was either absorbed with some matter, or he simply had no observations he deemed worth making. The friends thought nothing of his silence; but those unacquainted would suffer all sorts of bellicose curiosity. On the next visit, however, he might entertain his friends and astonish others with his flashing, scintillating comments on men and things. His moods were unpredictable.

In the ordinary social relations outside his home or classroom Roland Conklin never indulged in the facetiousness or flippant conversation, the inane persiflage and "smart talk" so common in the average social gathering. In any group or crowd he was almost invariably a silent observer and, to the stranger, apparently an indifferent, or inert listener. But one would err to infer from his reticent silence that he was

dull to what was taking place: for, in a flash, a cutting comment might shatter the smug assumption of that intolerable social bore, the incessant "wise-cracker." Amidst the common inanities of conversation a sardonic smile would slowly spread over his serious features; and if he did not upset the *amour propre* of some of the most conspicuous, one was not certain whether it was charity or contempt that held his tongue.

In the hilarious diversions of associates on "hikes" or picnics he seldom participated but now and then he would "let his *ego* go." One, who was a freshman at Eureka College in 1906-07, recalls the sensation which spread over the campus and through the corridors on hearing that on a faculty picnic Professor Conklin took part in a foot race with several notables and to the surprise of everyone easily out-distanced all competitors.¹² In another "Faculty" outing at Eureka a game of baseball was their diversion. To the astonishment of the dignitaries, old and young alike, the reticent Professor of Geology displayed an alert, discerning eye, and a steady nerve at bat. He hit the ball for a "three bagger," if not a home run, creating no little excitement.¹³

VII

Another noticeable characteristic of my departed colleague was his intense indignation if anyone did him, or anyone associated with him, a gross injustice. His feelings would surge up. His expressions in comment were instantly pointed and pungent—often biting. If the injustice was personal and not admitted or corrected when pointed out by him, he did not curb his feelings. The aggressor would get his opinion in no uncertain terms often flung forth with explosive energy. If he could not get the matter properly adjusted he had no respect for the sinner and avoided contact with him as he would a plague. He appeared to assume that everyone was intelligent and could (and would) judge their own actions; therefore when an injustice or a wrong was committed and not repented, he assumed deliberate intent.

¹²Recollections of Professor Charles J. Ritchey of Drake University.

¹³Dean S. J. Harrod of Eureka College to F. I. Herriott, letter dated January 7, 1937, at Eureka, Illinois.

Near the end of a semester in one of his classes a young lady suffered the loss of her notebook. Her credit for the term's work depended upon its presentation in due form. Since she was a very conscientious student and had prepared her notes with great care, she was in sore distress. She was certain the notebook had been stolen by some student; and she so informed Professor Conklin. In a short time he discovered the culprit, whom he denounced and expelled from his class. He further denounced the offender to the administrative authorities and insisted that severe punishment was due. Because of the prominence of the culprit in another complex he was not given his walking papers. Professor Conklin never ceased to flame with indignation when he thought of the incident in which false pretenses or fraud and petty larceny nearly robbed a *bona fide* student of her credits.

Years since he was a member of a club. He read a very instructive paper one night dealing with a controversy as to whether life and the universe were to be interpreted by the "mechanistic" or the "vitalistic" theory. Philosophers and scientists always get each other by the ears when they broach the subject. He dealt with the points in issue in a learned and brilliant fashion indicating his belief in the mechanistic interpretation.

At the time the churchmen and scientists were at grips over Darwinism and Evolution and its bearing upon religious creeds and the authority of the scriptures. Academic instructors found themselves, the country over, in a cross-fire and in more or less danger from belligerent defenders of old views who insisted ruthlessly upon teachers expounding primitive beliefs. At that meeting one member and a visitor seemed to him to be present with a hostile purpose and acted as if they were "tak'n notes" with a view to securing data for adverse charges. Professor Conklin was convinced that they were present as "spies." He was so incensed that he never went back to the club—deeming their conduct disreputable and unbecoming gentlemen and scholars. Some of us, less sensitive, while concurring in his suspicions, tried to disabuse his mind of the importance of the fact if he was correct: but he was impervious to our efforts to regain his confidence.

He had courage of the finest sort when a colleague suffered wrong. He would not only express his sympathy and deplore it. But he was ready to speak out in a public way if such would aid in correcting the injustice or he would out of self-respect proclaim that he did not approve or condone the treatment his colleague endured. He was not boisterous or declamatory about it, but he acted definitely and in a point-blank fashion. No one was left in a fog or shadow of doubt as to where he stood or what his feelings and opinions were. He was, in western parlance, a colleague "to ride the river with" and hence the solid respect and friendship his work-mates felt for him.

VIII

Two other facts stand out clearly in Professor Conklin's character and career which we should comprehend if we are to sense the notable reserve in his attitude towards religious ceremonial and creeds. While he was religious in the best and basic sense of the term he ever refrained from any vocal demonstrations of his feelings and he never indulged in any ostentatious ceremonial observances.

Expressions in his letters written from Harvard in 1891, make it clear that he was alienated from the old-time church preaching, with its sulphurous pulpit denunciation of "poor miserable sinners" and their consignment to the nether depths of burning marl, or its rancorous excommunication of scientists because they disturbed ancient dogmas and traditions. God and Nature were synonymous in his conception, and Nature's laws were the expression of the purpose or will of the Deity. Poetry he deemed the language of Nature, and he felt with Wordsworth (whom he quotes) that it "is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge, it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science. . ." In view of Professor Conklin's life and poetry the following is instructive:

I think there is nothing that gives me more true pleasure than a poem that breathes of the very spirit of nature. . . . Old fashioned preaching has left a bad impression. An object more to be feared than loved, more awful than lovely. If God be Father, Nature is a tender loving Mother.¹⁴

¹⁴Roland E. Conklin to Miss Maud McDonald, letter dated at Cambridge, Mass., December 4, 1891.

It is the God in Nature that men love, rather the strange mysterious being so distant and unsearchable. I think the principle is this that to *love* is to *know* and to *feel*. We love those things we *know*. I don't believe there is such a thing as Atheism. Men simply have different names for the same object of love and reverence, and the *name* is the thing that has been fought over. . . . Suppose a man says he does not believe in God: he believes in Nature, he must acknowledge that Nature has the same power over him and his destiny that another would ascribe to God for he is just as much a part of nature as any other object and he knows her laws are as fixed and immutable as the laws the other ascribes to God, and if he is just as conscientious as the other he will be just as good a man. We are too much in the habit of thinking if a man doesn't belong to the church he is bad.¹⁵

We may perceive the same feelings and drift in his religious views in an interesting article summarizing his experiences while sojourning in the White Mountains in the summer vacation of 1892. Two paragraphs and a stanza from one of his early poems are given:

There is something in the very nature of a river that commands the deepest respect. I never watch its moving waters but with something of the sentiment that breathes in "The Song of the Brook"—onward yet always here; changing with every moment yet always the same; now here, now there, then gone forever, yet the very expression of all that is present and eternal. How like the current of earth's great life procession as each drop comes forth from eternal springs, lives in the passing wave, and melts into the depths of the unknown.

* * * * *

It is only when in the depths of her solitudes where dwells the spirit of nature that we begin to catch the secret meaning of her inner self. And no place is better adapted to awaken a consciousness of the relation of the moving spirit of nature to the deeper life of the soul of man, than the mysterious quietude of a mountain tarn.

* * * * *

Winds are sighing
Thro' the branches
Of the pine trees, dark and tall,
Sounds are dying
In the distance
Echoed by the mountain wall,
From the woodland where all nature
Waits the Vesper's holy call.¹⁶

¹⁵*Ibid.*, letter dated December 18, 1891.

¹⁶*The Pegasus*, May, 1894, Eureka, Illinois.

From the outset Professor Conklin displayed a breadth and generosity of religious conception which comprehended all rightminded seekers after truth and all doers of righteousness. He concurred with St. Paul in his notable letter to the Romans:

For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves:

Which show the work of the law written in their hearts; their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts, the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another. II:14-15.

Religion as he conceived it in practical life was the appreciation and realization of the best in life—so living as to fulfill all one's obligations to self and family, and associates in life's normal relationships. Concern for and consideration of others were, in the large, consideration for one's larger and finer self—the realization of the altruism which one finds throughout animate nature, attaining its finest fruition in man's social relationships.

Professor Conklin was an individualist after the manner of Herbert Spencer. He knew that nature was exacting and rigorous in demanding ability and achievement. Success in the struggle for existence, which is Nature's inexorable law, was to the capable, to the strong and the swift of foot, to the superior brain and education, and to the staunch of character. "To him that hath shall be given" is nature's basic law for all animated nature including man. His altruism was naught else than an expression of his sense of the golden rule. Further he wanted for others the same mete of justice he demanded for himself.

Part and parcel of the latter traits was his reticence about current popular philanthropy. He was very sensitive to human suffering and was ever quick to give of his sympathy and assistance. But in the twenty-two years of my association with him I cannot recall that I ever heard him say a word about missionary programs or express any pronounced interest in what in these latter days has been heralded to the four corners of the heavens as "Social Uplift," or "Social Justice." Aware of nature's stern discipline, he could not but deem

much, if not most of it more than futile,—aye! perverse and demoralizing. This thought was indicated in a letter to me not long before his health gave way.¹⁷

IX

The memories of colleagues, who work beside one another for years within a University complex, co-operating in the common purpose, experiencing the same perplexities and trials, are the best evidence for measuring the real worth and influence of a man. It is the daily routine in the ceaseless round of prosaic tasks, in the grind and the pull and tug of the day's work that men discern, and correctly appraise, a man's ability and achievement, his character and conduct as a man and as a colleague. It is the severest of tests. If he can meet this test such a one is compounded of stuffs that wear well and refine with time. Roland Conklin met this test in full measure as the memories of his work-mates in Drake disclose. I venture to offer some clusters from three of his colleagues.

Dr. Luther S. Ross, Professor of Zoology, 1892-1932, already cited, thus records his appreciation:

Several years of close association with Professor Conklin gave me some insight into his character and his nature. That which impressed me most, after the recognition of a sterling character, was his extreme sensitiveness—a sensitiveness that found expression in delightful little poems descriptive of some natural beauty, or in a loving tribute to the wife of his youth.

His reactions to contact with his fellow men showed his nature to be very delicately balanced so that he was hurt by wrongs either real or fancied, and instead of putting them out of his mind, his tendency was to brood over them causing himself unnecessary unhappiness. In the class room his joy was in the earnest thinking student, but the inattentive timekiller was reprimanded in no uncertain manner.

He saw the delicate beauty of form and color in nature, and then could find words so descriptive that others could see also.¹⁸

Dr. A. D. Veatch, Professor of Semetic Language and Literature, has many fine memories of Roland Conklin's friendship and courage in a critical juncture:

¹⁷Professor Conklin to F. I. Herriott, letter dated January 26, 1937, at Eureka, Illinois.

¹⁸Professor L. S. Ross to F. I. Herriott, letter dated November 30, 1937, at Claremont, California.

Professor Conklin was the soul of integrity. I never knew him to swerve the least from what he believed to be true. He went straight to the point. When he had spoken, all knew his views. Yet he was never arrogant or offensive.

He never pretended or put on airs. He knew that mortals are all made of the same common clay. He was a little diffident, but never self-righteous. . . .

. . . When his friends were in distress, they had his sympathy and help—shown without regard as to what others might think.

. . . While one of the most matter-of-fact men I ever knew yet he had a mystical element in his nature. This made him a poet of no mean ability, of whose genius but few ever knew.

His profound knowledge of nature and his belief in evolution led him to believe, contrary to the opinions of most scientists, that man will finally solve the ultimate mystery of the existence of the Universe. . . .

As a fine perfume has a lingering sweetness, so will the memory of my friend Conklin linger with me.¹⁹

Dr. Herbert Martin, now head of the department of Philosophy in the State University of Iowa, was Professor of Philosophy in Drake from 1911 to 1925. His admiration for Roland Conklin was pronounced and abiding:

In thinking over my association with him three characteristics stand out. He was a gentle soul—I use the gentle in the sense of gentleman. His gentleness was that of nobility. It was innate and constitutive. Without it such poems of his as I am acquainted with could not have been written. I found Professor Conklin, too, to desire and appreciate friends and friendships. His quiet and unobtrusive demeanor was often misinterpreted as social indifference. I have often felt the warmth of his heart. I think of him again, and can see and hear his expressions of horror when faced with hypocrisy and unreality. Confronted by pretense he shuddered to the depth of his soul. Conklin was a white soul.

He was a lover of the beautiful,
the good and the true²⁰

Still other phases of his habits of thought and feeling and modes of expression are brought out in the recollections of Mrs. Arthur J. Rider, wife of Dr. Rider, head of the Department of Chemistry in Drake.

It was his habit to walk out to Waveland Park, evening after evening, to gaze at the sunset. On his way home he would occasionally

¹⁹Professor A. D. Veatch to F. I. Herriott, letter dated November 28, 1937, at Des Moines, Iowa.

²⁰Professor Herbert Martin to F. I. Herriott, letter dated December 3, 1937, at Iowa City, Iowa.

stop at our home, sit in our backyard, speak of the evening sunset, especially if it had been unusually beautiful, admire the different kinds of beauty which he found in the flowers of our garden—and then at other times just quietly sit.

A silent retiring man with a face not usually alight with revealing zest and enthusiasm, he would become suddenly an animated talker (at least it seemed so in contrast) and his face and eye would become radiant when one mentioned or asked him something of keen interest to him as I frequently did in regard to his poems. For instance I was much impressed when I read each new poem he gave me or sent me of the rare new words which expressed so adequately (I found on study) the subtle meaning he wished to convey. I once spoke to him about that and his face lighted up with unusual glow; and with an unusual animation and yet with a certain reticence—he told me of his search and study for the new and the right word to convey his meaning.

He was keenly alert to an appreciation of the beautiful. He found it (the beautiful) where others passed it by unnoticed. I believe he loved his friends and hated his enemies with a greater intensity than many.

After he discovered my pleasure in his poems, almost every time I saw him he would quietly reach into his pocket and pass over to me a card on which was written a poem he wished me to read: this frequently without a word. Several he gave me to keep; and one especially he said he wrote for me—about our garden.²¹

X

Those who knew Roland Conklin as a botanist and geologist, or as an effective lecturer on bacteriology or mineralogy, or as an expositor of the evolution of nature's multitudinous forces and forms, knew but a part of the man. Unless they came within the circuit of his friendship or confidence they knew not his interesting inner self which so far as the heedless passing throng was concerned he seemed to keep under lock and key. That inner self was peculiarly sensitive to the beauties and harmonies of nature and so attuned to the finer subtleties of life that like an Aeolian harp, it gave forth

Sounds and sweet airs that gave delight,
and hurt not.

His letters written at Cambridge while in Harvard display intense interest in poetry which he deemed the truest and

²¹Mrs. Arthur J. Rider to F. I. Herriott, letter dated December 17, 1937, at Des Moines, Iowa.

most telling expression of the laws and harmonies of nature. That interest early took form in lyric expression. Lifting lines in "fine-filed phrase" came from his pen and confirmed an observation of the Sage of Craiggenputoeh that poetry is "the harmonious union of man and nature."

Further, we may without much hesitation conclude that the gentle Muse, Euterpe, often stirred his feelings and inspired his pen when memories of grief and wrongs possessed him: for, of poets Shelley tells us

They learn in suffering what
they teach in song.

In his *Autobiography* Herbert Spencer discusses the popular assumption that there is an inherent antagonism between Science and Poetry. One who specializes in the physical sciences—chemistry or physics, geology or biology, botany or zoology—or in the mechanical arts, does not as a rule discern the majestic harmonies of nature. Nor does he thrill at the beauties and the rhythm of her myriad manifestations. If perchance he does in some measure sense them, he cannot express his feelings in other than matter-of-fact prose.

The scientist, of necessity, is absorbed in the minutia of a narrow segment of nature or life in which he studies or works. He may, but seldom does, see the inner connections or the general influences of forces and forms outside his particular field. He is wont to be indifferent to the beauties of form and color, to the subtle essences of things and the grandeur of the vast complex of intricate relationships of microscopic phenomena with far-flung masses of matter and the myriad forms of organic life out of which man and society, science and art have slowly evolved through eons of time. Spencer, however, points out that Goethe, while famous as a poet, was notable for his scientific researches and contributions.

The poet must, like the "sweet singer of Colonus" and the famous Bard of Avon,

. . . . See life steadily and see it whole.

Roland Ellsworth Conklin possessed this ability to a remarkable degree; in equal measure there was combined in

him the accurate discerning eye of the scientist and the sensitive soul of the poet; and with his mind's eye he could see far beyond the common ken and put his thoughts and feelings into luminous lines. He was ever quick to see and to

Pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon.

The "flower in the cranied wall" and the majestic mountains equally attracted and allured Roland Conklin's spirit. Dr. L. S. Ross, his colleague of many years, writes that they were "members of a little party which drove across from Claremont, California, to see Boulder Dam as it was nearing completion. His [Conklin's] delight in the wayside flower and in the grim massive walls of the canyon apparently were equal. His was the most sensitive and poetic nature I have ever known intimately."²²

Nature's marvelous kaleidoscope stirred his poetical senses more perhaps than any other fact in the phenomena round about him—although we shall see that any happy coincidence or episode suggesting the fineness of human nature, or the niceties of life among his associates would instantly inspire his pen. As his letters from Harvard in the early '90's clearly intimated, his fondness for nature and his pleasure in Wordsworth's poetry, which is redolent with the fragrance of flowers and reflects the forces and majesty of nature, explain the Wordsworthian character of so much of Professor Conklin's poetry. Moreover, he was in accord with our own Emerson who assures us that "We are as much gainers by finding a new property in the old earth as by acquiring a new planet." Or as the Seer of Concord puts it in another connection,

There is no great and no small
to the Soul that maketh all.

In brief and in summary, the marvels revealed by the microscope are not less thrilling and no less vital to the promotion of the welfare of man than the disclosures of the telescope.

Poetry with Roland Conklin came from his inner self like the murmuring waters of a forest spring. It was not pumped

²²Dr. L. S. Ross, *op. cit.*

up. An incident, a courtesy of a student, a request from a class, a chance remark that stirred his sense of the fitness of things, a walk with a companion or friend in dell or park, the experience of a colleague or a gracious word of appreciation, would likewise stir his poetic instincts, and a sonnet or other form of lyric expression would soon be in the making.

Another fact suggests a marked characteristic of the man in connection with his poetical nature—namely his indifference about their publication in the ordinary media of "publicity" which poets generally seem to covet most ardently. He cared little or nothing for that sort of public applause or notice. If perchance they were published it was because someone asked for them and gave them printed form.

It is not feasible here to give many illustrations of Professor Conklin's genius for lyric expression but the circumstances of various poems and a few lines from each one selected will convince both the critic and the layman that he was a master of limpid lines and exquisite expression.

XI

His perception of the delicate weaving in the warp and woof of Nature's looms is effectively demonstrated in his lines addressed "To a Maiden Hair Fern" composed while he was teaching at Eureka College.

No blossom hues and perfume breath conspire
To win thee favor in the sight of men
* * * * *

Thine is the simple grace of perfect form,
Vailing beneath thy lightly pencilled shape
The dainty spirit of a primal art
Thou fairest child of nature's early norm
As though some saintly maiden should escape
And dwell in convent solitude apart.²³

In May, 1924, Professor Conklin was invited to go with a party of light-hearted collegians to spend a day at "The Ledges," one of Iowa's beautiful state parks, near Boone. It is a region of entrancing woods and wild life and flowers, containing almost mountainous bluffs and deep dells on the southern side or right bank of the Des Moines river as it

²³Published in *Birds and Nature*, XVI, 176, November, 1904.

flows in its winding way to the eastward in its south-easterly course to join the Father of Waters. Its scenery always arouses the lover of nature to ecstatic eulogies and anon makes even the inert exclaim at its beauty.

While more or less taciturn en route, Professor Conklin no sooner saw the beautiful vistas in the landscape and the gorgeous foliage and the masses of vari-colored shrubbery than he became alert, animated and vocal with his delight in the scenery. His student associates, so accustomed to his class-room reserve, were astonished at his vivacious descriptions of the species of flowers and shrubs and the minuteness and sweep of his comments on the peculiarities of this and that specimen to which he directed their attention. For a considerable time he was the focus point of the group's interest and enjoyment. Then he became absorbed and silent, and with no comment, he stepped aside, and sat down at the base of a tree. In a short time a poem took form on a card which he called "The Park."

A stretch of Woodland with its slope
So deeply etched no plow can mar.

* * * * *

Where April calls all living to new life
And early flowers and early birds and bees
May ply their venturesome quest unharmed
And timid wild things see the light of day.
Happy the thought that useless wastes may be
The refuge and delight of countless lives
That higher ends than self and greed may flow
From rocks and streams inviolate
And you and I may meet them unafraid
Our Mother Nature and our Father God.

If Professor Conklin had any one favorite mode of forgetting the worries and aggravations of the day's work, it was a walk toward the close of the day to Waveland Park in west Des Moines—often asking one of his colleagues or a friend to accompany him. There among the beautiful trees and vistas of the hills he watched the flashing, fusing brilliances in the clouds and cerulean blue produced by the rays of the low descending sun. Twilight and the evening hour made him ponder the close of life and the purport of its

mysteries in the ongoing of its stream of energy and man's yearnings. One of his poems first entitled "Twilight" but later called "The Quest" expressed his reflections.

Some evening ere the dark has fallen quite
While still a little twilight lingers there
About the portal, and the chilly air
Creeps slowly in the wake of coming night,
I'll rise and draw my cloak and fasten tight
And take my staff and slowly follow where
She beckons from the echelon cloud stair;
My good Angel to guide my steps aright.
Nor shall I quake nor falter with a fear,
Knowing the way of all the Good and Great
Who've journeyed erstwhile to that unknown West
But curious of each enchantment near
And wonderous of the scenes that lie in wait,
I'll fare me on that immemorial quest.

Roland Conklin's aloofness and marked reserve cloaked, many of us suspected, a sense of loneliness. It may have been that memories of mistreatment or injustice which he had endured (and which he could not easily forget), embittered him, and he stood apart from the heedless throng lest he again encounter harsh treatment. Whatever the explanation, any chance courtesy offered him or manifestation of kindness shown him by friend or student stirred him deeply and his feeling would take form in lilting verse.

One day, one of his students and assistants, Miss Elizabeth Buck, who was alert in his subjects and effective in class work, brought him a cluster of bitter sweet. Not long after he gave her a token of his appreciation on a card containing a poem entitled "Bitter Sweet."

Brown twigs with crimson arils clinging
* * * * *
Their fading relics of its color song
Are but its beauty-spirit haunting thee.
Their redolence of kindly thought and cheer
I shall remember long, remember long.

If any one should assume from what has gone before that Drake's Professor of Botany and Geology was interested merely in the beauties of rocks and streams and wild flowers and the thousand creeping things of Nature, let him cast the

assumption aside. One of his assistants (from whom I have quoted) has sent me the following exquisite *jeu d' esprit*

BLUE EYES

The blue of her dear eyes to me
Is elemental in its hue
The liquid, laving, languid blue
Of vastitudes wherein I see
Strong hints of all the blues there be
* * * * *
Gentian and larkspur blues that grew
In leaden soils and never knew
Their kinship to the Rosemary
O' never were ne'er can be
Eyes like my dream girl has for me.

Is there any blue-eyed lass, or stately dame of a royal court
who would not stand athrill at lilting lines like these!

XII

During his first year in Drake Professor Conklin enjoyed with all of us the excellent choral performances conducted by Dean Frederick Howard of the Conservatory of Music. He possessed a fine baritone voice. His sudden death on November 26, 1908, shocked the community. The common feelings were admirably expressed in the following:

A VOICE IS STILLED

A voice is stilled
That lately thrilled
With music murmurous low or passion filled
Our morning hour.
Out on the night
It took its flight
To join the chorus of the song of light
Beyond the dawn.
From that far shore
No more, no more
As in the song-enamored days of yore
It comes to us.
Let silence be
While memory
Rebuilds its half-forgotten ecstasy
In one last strain.

To sooth our brief
 Impassioned grief
 And bring the healing balm of sure relief
 He *doeth well*.

Leaving the University Auditorium with Dr. Ross after a morning assembly, Professor Conklin called attention to the ivy on the wall of "Old Main" with its gorgeous hues of color, and likened it to a tapestry. In a few days, Dr. Ross writes, "rather diffidently he showed me a little poem. . . ." He called it "An Autumn Tapestry." I give a few lines:

I know an old neglected wall not far,
 Where ivies cling and climb in wanton care:
 * * * * *
 With Autumn's breath the looms were strangely stilled
 The calm of expectation hushed the carth,
 As those who feared and waited some glad birth,
 The night came on, starbright and hoarfrost filled;
 The morning with its radiance flared and burned,
 And as I looked the tapestry turned.²⁴

Hearing his colleague, Dr. Herbert Martin, read a paper before the Woman's Club of Des Moines in 1912 on "Friendship," a day or two later he gave him a sonnet entitled "The Fairest Flower." A few lines will indicate the fine feelings he felt and expressed:

There is a flower I could name for thee
 The fairest of all the chemistry of time
 * * * * *
 Go seek it out where it may be found:
 * * * * *
 Pay all thou hast to make its fragrance thine:
 True Friendship rarest of the flowers divine.

When one of Drake's conscript Fathers, Dr. B. E. Shepperd, Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, retired in 1911 after thirty years of service, Professor Conklin wrote a tribute to him in verse which he read at an assembly. Two stanzas may indicate the course of his memories.

So thou our friend of many days
 Hast long sought wisdom's deeper things,
 Hast loved her labyrinthine ways
 And followed fair truth's beckonings.

²⁴This is the initial poem in *A First Book of Iowa Poets* (Des Moines, Iowa, 1928).

Thy high souled virtues needed not
 The common props of sect and creed,
 Eternal Right thy only thought
 Transcendent Good thy only need.

As we have seen, Professor Conklin, when returning from Waveland Park, now and then, stopped at the home of another colleague, the head of the department of chemistry, Dr. Arthur J. Rider, who is an ardent lover of flowers and who devoted much of his spare time to his garden in their successful culture. Professor Conklin was struck by his associate's fondness for them and his appreciation of their various forms and shades of color. One day he handed Mrs. Rider a poem entitled "In a Garden" whence I excerpt the concluding six lines:

And happy you my friends who find in these
 A pleasure and a recompense replete
 And in the quiet of its blest retreat
 The consonance of life's sweet verities,
 Where beauty is love cannot be far
 And peace as tranquil as the evening star.

Mr. Charles O. Denny, for many years professor of the classical languages in Drake, was struck down in 1927 by a cerebral hemorrhage. The word got abroad that death immediately ensued. The next day Professor Conklin handed me a sonnet with the caption "In a Cathedral."

Yours is a temple built of classic stone
 Etruscan marbles from the Mantuan ledges

* * * * *

A reverent silence everywhere pervades
 Its aisles and nave and its strong facades
 Reflect the star gleams of a kindly light
 Your memory has set a mark for aye
 On all who knew your faithful generous way.

In common with other academic folks in the country we at Drake in 1924 celebrated the 90th birthday of President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard. I had charge of the program and I asked Professor Conklin to give some of his memories of his *Alma Mater* and of his days "'neath the elms of Harvard." His part that morning is unforgettable. He came forward in his usual unpretentious way—his face solemn not to say stern. With an air of remoteness, he began in an

unemotional manner and prosaic tone. Previous speakers had delivered brief addresses or "talks." The audience assumed that Professor Conklin would follow with another. Soon one noticed eyes opening, whispering stopped, heads lifted abruptly. They sensed something different from an ordinary speech. He was reading a poem. Its caption was "Fair Harvard." The first two and the last lines are reproduced.

Thy sons have heard the call
 And faith would answer and rejoice
 * * * * * * *
 Hail him all sons of Harvard now.
 Hail him all men in all the earth
 Who through his ninety years, unselfishly
 Has labored, loved and sacrificed.
 Without a stain to blot or mar
 And with the strength and patience of
 The campus elm he labors to the end.
 O! blest beyond all reckoning
 Those ninety years so nobly spent
 Here's health to thee and long life,
 Our Master, and the whole wide world's
 Great-hearted friend.

After the exercises that morning I asked him for the MS. for publication. He shook his head with an expression that was half scowl and half smile, and said: "Not now. I can fool people when I am reading *viva voce*, but I can't when I commit it to cold type. I had better look it over to smooth the jagged and rough lines in it."

XIII

The members of the Class of 1913 of the College of Liberal Arts asked Professor and Mrs. Conklin to serve as their "Class Father and Mother." Their comradeship he enjoyed. His pleasure in their reunions, picnics and fun and frolic was manifested on three different occasions in poetical form. From their class letter called "Round Robin," I take excerpts from three poems written at various dates.

Mrs. Conklin, a woman of marked ability, poise and dignity and rare social charm, died on December 25, 1912. At the first reunion of the class in 1914 Professor Conklin paid tribute to her memory in verses finely phrased:

FOR LOVE OF HER

O not for me June's roses bloom
 And perfumes all the air,
 I only see some crimson light
 Against her ebon hair.

And not for me the song bird's note
 From out the maple tree,
 I only hear across the years
 Her murmured lullaby.

* * * * *

O floating cloud and breaking wave
 What deeper meaning thou,
 Than that she knew and loved thee once,
 And I loved her somehow.

The next year he sensed the leaping ambitions and hopes of the members of the class and expressed them in three stirring stanzas under the caption:

THE NEW YEAR

O' for the splendor of the Unfulfilled,
 The hopes and fancies of the days to be,
 Love's vows replighted, joy's cups refilled
 And Life's dear dreams that dawn deliciously.

No more the withered leaves of misspent years,
 The conjured dust of buried memory
 No more the shudder or the blanching fears,
 That mar the Avas of Life's rosary.

Across this wintry, snow-white page is writ
 "The past is spent, its purplest wines are spilled,
 Broken are the strings, gone the long dream of it,"
 Welcome! Thrice welcome thou the unfulfilled.

In 1916 his feelings were again surcharged with memories of the Class Mother who had left them in their senior year and they took form in a sonnet. Its lines gleam with soft iridescent hues of thought and feeling.

THE IDEAL

Enthroned upon the topmost peak of thought,
 Dim-outlined on the dreamy depths of air
 A vision hides, her form divinely fair,
 Clad in soft light with filmy clouds inwrought,
 Oft' these far heights my inward eye have sought
 In vain. The dull gray mists were gathered there

And oft again peering with conscious care
Glimpses of some vague form I've faintly caught.
But once, my grosser self removed a space
And wandering like a spirit, clouds between
And veil loose drawn, I looked upon her face.
No voice was heard, no beck'ning hand was seen,
But O the depth of soul 'neath those calm brows
And O the wealth of life that look endows.

XIV

After twenty-two years of instructional service in Drake Professor Conklin, in 1929, took advantage of his rights under the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and retired as Professor Emeritus. His remaining years he spent partly in southern California with his three children in Claremont, Pasadena, and Terra Cotta, and partly in his old home in Chambersburg, Illinois.

One incident occurred after he concluded his work at Drake which gave him special pleasure for it signalized the esteem in which he was held by his work-mates. On the initiative of his colleagues he was elected to membership in the Gamma Chapter in Iowa of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, the oldest honorary scholastic fraternity in the country.

Miscellaneous diversions occupied Professor Conklin's time and energy after his departure from Des Moines:—some were of a prosaic character in the way of looking after his financial and industrial interests, aiding in the construction of his son's home at Claremont, and others were of a scholastic and literary type. But his favorite pursuit continued to be a study of nature and her infinite variety and the occasional expression of his feelings and views in poetical form.

While in California Professor Conklin enhanced his happiness by his marriage with Miss Freda B. Kleinlein, a friend of many years in his old home at Chambersburg, Illinois.

With one exception all of his poems, so far as known, were of sonnet form or of slightly greater or lesser number of lines. The exception was notable. Sometime before leaving Drake he began the composition of a poetical narrative of the origin and descent of the earth which he entitled "The Crucials of Earth History." It was epic in form and objec-

tive. An ambitious undertaking, it was but partially completed, or perhaps it is nearer the truth to say that he had not perfected the narrative.

He undertakes to describe the beginnings and the course of the evolution of the earth and its species of animate nature from the original gaseous substances, or "star dust" and fire mists in the vast reaches of the universe, slowly, through eons of time, congealing into molten masses, whence evolve stars and planets, thence in our revolving earth come the rocks and waters that contain the germs of life out of which develop the bacteria and cell-like forms and the later larger forms of animal and vegetable life culminating in man's dominion over all. Its opening lines will give one an earnest of the whole:

Before men dived in earth to know
The rocks and all their mysteries,
The shepherds watched their flocks by night
And searched the wonders of the skies.
No thought was in the minds of men
That in those far off silent depths,
Where endless time and space abide
The garden of their Eden grew
No thought that from their search would go
A tiny stream to onward flow
And widen deepen farther reach
And in the fullness of its sweep
Should water all the fields of thought
And grow new Edens 'long its way
To oceans of Eternity
Their primal questions whither? whence?
Are still unanswered in their full
But holding fast the good and true
Our search thru endless time and space
Has brought reward,
If only in the broader view
The deeper meaning greater hope
And farther reaching sympathy.

In what was perhaps the last sonnet he composed—or at least the last that he completed to his satisfaction—Professor Conklin reflects his delight and joy in the scenery amidst which he lived and moved in southern California. The people of that state were suffering from financial and industrial depression as were those of all other states in the country

at large and the heavens were split with violent public debates and ugly contention. But he was not disturbed by the tumult and the shouting in the market place or the acrimonious discussion in the political forum. He dwelt amidst gorgeous foliage and the fragrance of flowers and songs of nature's choristers—yet out of his window he could see the eternal snows which glistened on the mountain peaks of the nearby range.

As he contemplated the beauties and the grandeur of the country in which he lived and moved, instincts and traditional sentiments surged up and took form in a sonnet which very appropriately he entitled "My Castle" which is given at length.

A plat of virgin earth with sky above,
Between the mountains and the molten sea;
Winds of the earth what e'er they chance to be,
Clouds, storms and sunshine night and day, I love
Them all; Great trees in everlasting green,
Grass, flowers and shrubs of every kind and hue,
Their beauty and their fragrance ever new,
And songs of birds from silences serene;
Dawns ever breaking on eternal snows
And sunsets staining phantom waves and sky
Where blue meets blue in mist and mystery;
By day my soul shall feast, by night repose.
Come with me, Love, while still there's time and tide
Into my Castle trove and there—abide.

XV

In closing the books in which mankind is wont to keep its accounts of the careers of mortals in this vale of tears, we are not so much concerned with the grand total of the credits and debits, as we are in the balance we find when the final footings are made.

He who combines ability in accomplishment with consideration and courtesy for those with whom one works or comes in contact, force of character with camaraderie and friendliness with associates or the casual wayfarer in the common circuits of life, such a one is the flower of cultivated society, "the scholar and the gentleman"—or as Geoffrey Chaucer happily put it six centuries ago

. . . . a veray parfit gentil knight.

Roland Ellsworth Conklin was in very truth a scholar and a gentleman. He was not a genius of the blazing sort, eccentric and erratic, unpredictable and unlovely in manners and mean in action; and he was not of the courtier type of Chesterfieldian gentleman, debonair and effusive with compliments of the species common in drawing rooms. But he was a scientist of marked ability and achievement; he was an instructor of keen discernment and vivid descriptive powers who saw life in the large as well as in minutia;—more he possessed a personality attuned to the finest in nature and life with an exquisite sense of the eternal fitness of things. Appreciation of the beauties and majesty of nature ever stirred him deeply, and just consideration for the rights and welfare of his associates always coerced his thoughts. Aloof and remote in manner his friends were impressed by the “sweetness and light” that permeated his feelings, spoken words and acts of friendship. In fine, in the language of two of his confreres, Roland Conklin was a “white Soul” and his friendship lingers in their memories like a “fine perfume.”

We see an extract made from an Indianapolis paper, that Hon. Ratlief Boon has been appointed Governor of Iowa Territory. The *Cincinnati Gazette*, seems to think there is some truth in the statement. *Iowa Sun and Davenport & Rock Island News*, Davenport, July 3, 1839.

Our correspondent at Washington city writes that Gen. Wilson will most assuredly be offered the executive chair of Iowa and that he will most probably accept it.

It is noticed in another column that Gen. W. would be in Washington on the occasion of Gen. Harrison's inauguration, whence we are led to conjecture he will return to New Hampshire and make such preparations as will enable him to reach here on the fourth of July at which time Governor Lucas' commission expires by limitation. *Iowa Standard*, Bloomington (Muscatine), Iowa, March 26, 1841.

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